knowledge of what to select, will not lead to the production of fine works. To avoid the error of ugliness, deformity, and unfitness, a standard is needed to guide us; and this standard can only be gained, the shortness of life being considered, by the study of the works of the great masters who have gone before.

THE SAXON QUESTION.

AN ACCOUNT OF REPTON PRIORY AND CHURCH.*

THE pleasure of antiquarian research, particularly into those matters which relate to architecture, is ever attended, as are most of the things which delight us, by some care. The fear that, after the most lengthened inspection, the most accurate comparison, the most careful measurements, the most laborious research among books and manuscripts, some little circumstance may have been overlooked, some short passage unnoticed, or some unusual character misread, gives anxiety and care to what otherwise is to an educated mind the most delightful as well as useful and instructive of human pursuits. It is for this reason we so frequently complain of the short period that has been allotted to our labours, and we wish we had had more time to bestow upon them, not from habits of procrastination or irresolution, or by the way of excuse for the little we have collected, but simply because we dread there is yet something behind we have not seen—some valuable fruit we have not plucked. But when, as in my own case, I explain that my time has been too short in every sense, as I understood this task would have been undertaken by another member, I trust you will understand how much anxiety I must feel from the reasons I have assigned, and hope that any error I may make will meet with kind excuse and gentle criticism.

I feel it the rather as this building is far more curious and interesting than I had at all anticipated, and as its investigation must lead to the discussion of theories the most important, and as yet uncertain in this branch of archæology. It is to be regretted that they have been discussed with much prejudice, hastiness, and acrimony. Some of the greatest men have been arrayed on each side of the question—the arguments on both sides are of the greatest weight—and I could almost reproach myself with presumption for attempting it to day. But it is my intention to endeavour to enter into the subject as a calm inquirer, and if I can add anything to the facts, or throw any light upon the dark corners of the case, I shall congratulate myself in having added my mite to the most interesting branch of architectural archæology.

The history of the foundation of this religious house is necessarily obscure, as all documents seem to have perished at the dissolution. It could not, of course, have existed before the conversion of Mercia to Christianity. This happy event commenced about A.D. 653. Peada, the fifth king, son of the warlike Penda, became attached to Alcfleda, daughter of Oswey, king of Northumberland, and having been instructed by her in the doctrine of the Christian religion, he was baptized, and married the princess. (Ven. Bede, iii., cap. 21.) Peada brought from Northumberland with him four priests to assist in the work of conversion; one of whom, Diuma, was consecrated the first bishop of Mercia, and died in 655, and was buried "in regione quæ vocatur Infeppingum." This has been conjectured with considerable show of reason to be the ancient name of Repton, which is afterwards variously given as Rependun, Repandune, Hrepandum, and Reppington. If this conjecture be correct, this church must have been founded at that time, and probably was the first Christian church in Mercia. Our first positive notice of its existence as an ecclesiastical building is found in the celebrated Liber Eliensis, lib. i. cap. 6, where it speaks incidentally of Adulph, the king, whose daughter, Edburga (or, as it varies in the copies, Ebburga, or Redburga), was abbess of Rependune, and who sent to Guthlac (afterwards canonized) the somewhat sombre gift of a leaden coffin, and a linen shroud. The same facts are given in Leland, Coll. i. 190, where he calls the lady Edburga. It must be with no small pride, the present inhabitants of the noble county that was once the kingdom of Mercia can regard an origin dating 1,200 years back. It will be for us to consider presently whether any part of the building be of that remote, most remote, antiquity. If it be so, we here have probably (now that it seems likely that St. Martin's, at Canterbury, has been rebuilt) the oldest building remaining in England, not excepting perhaps portions of the crypts at York.

The next mention we have of Repton is also preserved by Leland, Coll. ii. p. 278, where he states that Guthlac entered the monastery at Rependune, and then received the tonsure and clerical habit under the Abbess Alfrytha. The town and monastery seem now to have risen to great importance. The latter in particular seems to have become the Westminster Abbey of Mercia. Leland has preserved records (Coll. ii. p. 264) that S. Wistan, the son of one of the kings of Mercia, was buried there, "at that time," he says, "a famous monastery;" and that afterwards his bones were translated to Evesham. In 755 the Saxon Chronicle tells us that the warlike Ethelbald, who was killed treacherously by one of his own chiefs at Seccandune, was buried here. In 786, according to Thos. Rudborne, Ang. Sac. i. 196, Kynechard, the brother of Sigebright, King of Wessex, was also interred there, as well as Meruell, of whom he says,—"the body rests, as they say, at Repedune, a monastery formerly sufficiently noble for the residence of celebrated men and holy women; which place, according to its etymology, seems not to be silent as to the excellency of the king, for it seems to signify (sounds) the manipulus of a mountain. We get no more mention of Repton till 879, when the struggle took place between the King of Mercia and the Danes, who expelled from his kingdom Burrhed, who retired to Rome, where he died.

The Danes occupied the towns, and wintered there; and according to Inguif, then destroyed the monastery. It seems curious that Matthew of Westminster, the Saxon Chronicle, Ethelwerd, and Roger of Hovenden—all of whom describe the occupation of the town by the Danes—should be silent as to the destroying the monastery. Ingulf alone relates its ruin, and designates it as "the most celebrated monastery, the most holy mausoleum of all the kings of the Mercians." From all these combined testimonies, we must have the highest character of the sacredness of the monastery, which then appears to have been an institution both for monks and nuns, but under the chief rule of an abbess. Whatever destruction the Danes may have made, it is clear the church was not destroyed, or if destroyed it was immediately rebuilt; for the Doomsday Book says, "In Rependune and Middletune, Earl Algar has six carucates, &c. &c. Here is a church and two priests with one carucate of land."

This is all we hear of the building till 1172, when from a charter in the possession of the Ferrers family we read, that "Ranulf, called Gernons Earl of Chester, died the 17th of the kalends of January in the year 1153, the 18th of King Stephen; which Ranulf took to wife Mathilda, daughter of Robert Earl of Gloucester; which said Mathilda founded the priory of Rependune in the year of the Holy Trinity 1192, the eighteenth year of Henry II., which Mathilda died the 4th of the kalends of August, 1189." It appears that eleven years previously this lady had founded a priory for Austin Canons at Calk, and that in truth she removed them to Repton, leaving Calk as a small monastery or cell to Repton. We learn this from a charter fortunately preserved by the Harpur family, of Calk, and copied by Dugdale in 1664. It is addressed to Walter Bishop of Coventry, and concedes to the priory at Calk the quareria of Rependune on Trent, with the advowson of the church of St. Wistan, at Rependune, but on condition that the convent there shall be the head, and that as soon as fit opportunity should arrive Calk should only be a member thereof, and remain in its diocese. The charter is confirmed by another of Hugh Earl of Chester—without date. It appears from some documents cited by Morant in his History of Essex, that Mathilda also gave to Repton the advowsons of Great and Little Baddow, in that county; but little now is extant referring to the history of the building, although there are very numerous casual notices scattered through the different manuscripts in the British Museum. In the Harl. MS. 2044, we find that Sir W. Patrick granted an income of 200 shillings per annum arising from one of his mills, and shortly after the Prior of Repindune brings an action against his successors for the amount, and the marginal note says he "triumphed over him." We also read of several gifts of land "*pro salute animæ*," at different periods.

At last the storm that had been so long gathering burst on the monasteries, and Repton was seized by the king, its moveable possessions sold by the commissioners, and the land granted to the Thacker family. I hold in my hand a long and very curious list of all the goods thus appropriated, including the sum of 122*l.* 17*s.* 6*d.*, which the list says has been embezzled by two of the monks, willing, no doubt, to save what they could out of the fire. The buildings seem to have consisted of a church containing the chapels of St. John, Our Lady, St. Nicholas, Our Lady of Pity, and St. Thomas, a vestry, a cloister, chapter-house, dortour, fratery, hall, buttery, Prior's chamber, inner chamber, gardyn chamber, and another next to it; the hall chamber, the high chamber, the kitchen, larder, brew-house, ale-house, boulting-house, and kiln-house; the total value of all moveable goods therein being 162*l.* 19*s.* 6*d.*

Our next mention of the priory is in old Fuller, who tells us that Thacker, to whom the priory had been granted, hearing that Queen Mary was about to restore the monasteries, collected all the workmen he could, though on a Sunday, and pulled the church down, saying he "would destroy the nest, lest the birds should build therein again." "Church work," says Fuller, "is a cripple in going up, but runs post in coming down."

It now remains for us from these combined records to examine the work, and endeavour, if possible, to fix its date.

I have already adverted to the tone in which some disquisitions on this subject have been carried on, and deprecated for myself any bias or intention to pervert the facts or draw any inferences that are not fair. I can hardly wonder at the harsh things which have been said on one side. At one time a single and simple canon was laid down, and will be found printed in some of the early volumes of the Archæologia,—any circular arch was (*ex cathedrâ*) Saxon, every pointed arch Gothic. Now, let any man who could read a Latin charter be told that the cathedral of a bishopric, founded a hundred years after the Conquest, or a church built by one of Henry the Second's court, was Saxon, was rather too much; and when investigation after investigation showed that hundreds of most decided Norman examples had been registered as the works of the kings of the Heptarchy, it is not to be wondered at that the critics of the period grew hasty, and were disposed to knock down the Saxon advocate without much inquiry, and this has literally been the case lately. It appears to be the pride of some critics to forget that their ancestors ruled England for between four and five hundred years in wealth and prosperity, with almost superstitious feelings in religion, and with a literature not perhaps very refined, but certainly anything but irreligious; and yet that they did not build one church that remains to us, though hundreds which were confessedly commenced some twenty years after their dynasty had expired, have stood now nearly 800 years, and are likely to stand 800 more. While their seniors by a dozen years are supposed to have vanished long ago — *tenuis secessit in auras*. The two great errors in archi-

* The following interesting paper, which we recommend to the consideration of our readers, is a full report of an address delivered by Mr. Ashpitel at the recent meeting of the British Archæological Association.

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